

The Anabasis: a Diamond Jubilee

The year 2021 marks the 60th Anniversary of the founding of the Anabasis Mountaineering Club. It is an auspicious anniversary for the ex-Anabasis Members of the Rucksack Club but it has a broader interest, being embedded in the post-war history of mountaineering in Britain and with a link to the Rucksack Club of today. The story begins when Ian Cass formed a climbing partnership with 'a restless and brilliant young man (who) dressed like a tramp in the mountains and climbed like an angel.' That was Keith Britton who has a first ascent to his name in Yob Route on the Gribin Facet. They were no slouches, having done Munich Climb, Kaiserbirge Wall and Ribstone Crack the year before they were turned away from a Club Hut on a freezing winter night in Langdale. They had travelled up by motorbike and were struggling with black ice. It being too late to find anywhere to stay, they called at a Hut where the occupants were 'having a late drink', writes Ian. 'They were not able to offer us accommodation despite the fact that we were frozen and they had plenty of room.' 'It had become the Club's policy,' wrote Keith, 'to refuse anyone not from a BMC affiliated club, apparently by cartel agreement, the only exception being for members of another formally formed club with reciprocal rights.' That 'Explicitly superseded the long tradition of giving aid to mountaineers in difficulty because of weather or other unforeseen circumstances.' Ian wrote: 'We decided that weekend that we would try to start a new Club on Merseyside hopefully free of all the mumbo-jumbo that surrounded the traditional Clubs, a bit like the Rock and Ice in Manchester. The early 60's in Liverpool was a great time of change. What happened in Liverpool affected the whole nation and in a few years our way of life became a lot more open and we were very much caught up in all of that.' Keith: 'We had to join or form a Club. The former could give us a climbing base, but the latter could offer a home for those like us, the opportunity to build at least an irritant to the advance of conformity, and, if we were both lucky and quick, perhaps find a base of our own.'

Ian and Keith placed an advert in the Liverpool Echo in January 1961, and this was seen by William Murphy, who was concerned about eldest son George's lack of direction since returning to civvy street from the RAF. Involvement in Mountain Rescue had given George extensive experience in mountaineering but, he remembered, 'It was difficult in those times to break into the exalted levels of a climbing club. For, with its echoes of university and public school, it was a bastion of privilege. The climbing establishment had been shaken by the Rock and Ice, formed by working-class lads from the Manchester area, operating outside the traditional structures and, led by Joe Brown and Don Whillans, taking climbing standards to a new level. The Rock and Ice became an example for others to follow.'

The inaugural meeting was held at Liverpool Orphanage, in February. Cass's father was the Bursar there, his mother was the Matron and they had the room. Ian reports 'more than 50' people showing up, though George has a more precise 76. George recalls: 'We were met at the gate with a climbing rope laid across the drive and a man (later identified as Keith Britton) in white tie and tails!!! I thought this very eccentric and off putting for at this stage in

my life I still had difficulties in dealing with social situations outside my experiences. Consequently, I arrived at the meeting full of trepidation, it was chaos in a packed room, I had never come across such an articulate group of people, with the ability to give long speeches and everybody vying to be heard. I was completely over-awed by the polished introduction of the founder members – Keith and Ian. But this paled into insignificance at the savage verbal assault upon them by the audience led by Ian Sturrock. Well, you know this form of entertainment went on to become an odd tradition in the Club – this ritual ‘taking apart’ in Annual General Meetings. Anyway, it was a highly significant meeting in its encouragement of the ‘plebs’ into the climbing world, of making inroads into the class system.’

The Anabasis Mountaineering Club was formally constituted later that year, but it was not until the following year that we found that ‘base of our own’ at Garth Farm, near Capel Curig. Looking back 40 years later, Ian notes that had they would have been wise to turn back on that freezing night, but had they done so ‘the Anabasis would probably (have) never happened and perhaps more importantly the friendships and other liaisons that developed from it. Things often hang by a very fine thread.’

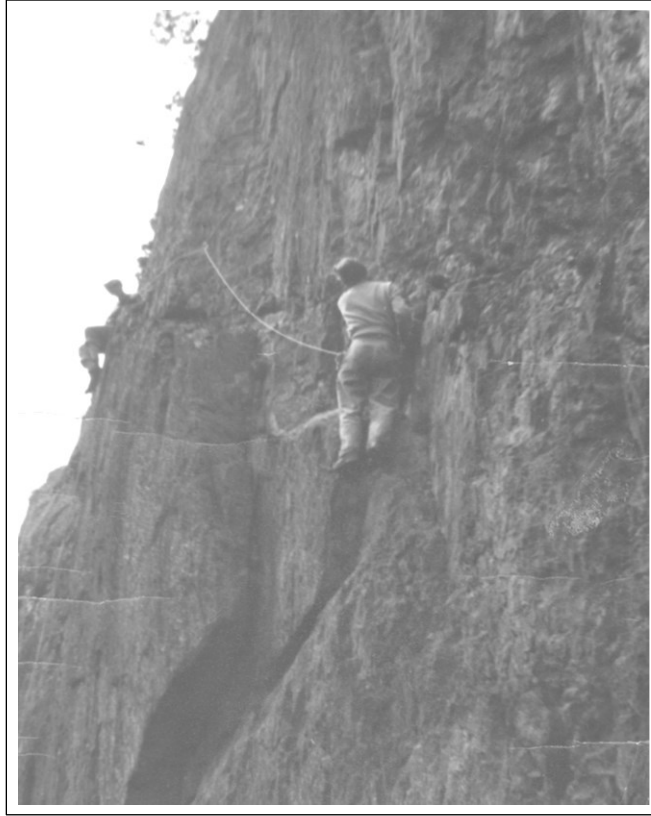
Both Ian and George are deceased, Keith Britton last heard to be living in the United States. Ian’s wife Rowena, our only direct link to those distant days is now a Member of the Rucksack Club. She will be at the Annual Dinner. And the Hut Ian and Keith were turned away from? The Wayfarers’ Robertson Lamb Hut in Langdale.

*‘...the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.’*

T.S. Elliot



*Winter Meet. 1962. Standing left to right: Ian Cass, Brian Clark, Ian Douglas, George Murphy, Len Kata, Ed Mollon, Don Hackett, Ray Rogers, Geoff Naylor, Alan Mills.
Kneeling: Terry Nolan, Rowena Cass, Irene Rogers, Patsy Cook, Elviva?, Mike Taberner.*



Ian Cass (left) and Keith Britton climbing. Believed to be Bilberry Buttness, Raven Crag, Langdale.